

SOF Integration with Conventional Forces: A Doctrine Gap?

**A Monograph
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Abstract

SOF Integration with Conventional Forces: A Doctrine Gap? by MAJ Gregory M. Stroud, U.S. Army, 40 pages.

Throughout the history of the United States, the American military has integrated capabilities from diverse military units. From the regulars under Washington and the local militias in the American Revolution to the airborne Divisions of World War II to the Special Operations Forces in the Global War on Terror, all of these units developed an organizational culture all their own due to the background of their soldiers and the function of their units. These different organizations and cultures have led to friction whenever they are employed together. The same is true today for discussion of the integration of Special Operations Forces (SOF) and the General Purpose Force (GPF). This paper will examine the doctrine within the scope of two case studies: OPERATION ANACONDA and Operations in northern Iraq during OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM in 2003. In both cases, doctrine provided clear guidance in organizing command and control structures. With no gap in doctrine, the problems of integrating GPF and SOF capabilities arise from other areas such as organizational culture, personalities, or understanding.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Literature Review	5
Relevant Doctrine.....	11
Doctrine of the Time	11
Current Doctrine.....	13
Methodology	13
Case Studies	15
Operation Enduring Freedom	15
Background	15
Analysis.....	23
Operation Iraqi Freedom	27
Background	27
Analysis.....	30
Conclusion.....	36
Bibliography	39

Introduction

Throughout the history of the United States, the American military has integrated capabilities from diverse military units. From the regulars under Washington and the local militias in the American Revolution to the airborne Divisions of World War II to the Special Operations Forces in the Global War on Terror, all of these units developed an organizational culture all their own due to the background of their soldiers and the function of their units. These different organizations and cultures have led to friction whenever they are employed together. The same is true today for discussion of the integration of Special Operations Forces (SOF) and the General Purpose Force (GPF).¹ This paper will examine the doctrine within the scope of two case studies to determine if a gap in doctrine exists. The analysis of the case studies highlights that doctrine sufficiently guides commanders in organizing command and control structures.

Since the dissolution of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) into the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and military special operations forces, the conventional military has often begrudgingly accepted the presence of these elite units. The services acknowledge their capabilities as useful, but on the fringe. Up until the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986, the services consistently underfunded, underequipped, and undertrained these forces.² The failures of OPERATION EAGLE CLAW in Iran and OPERATION URGENT FURY in Grenada highlighted the errors of this line of logic.³ The Act determined that it was time to take the responsibility for these forces out of the Services' hands and formed the U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) to better prepare the nation's special operations capabilities. The successes

¹ For the purposes of this paper, the terms GPF and conventional forces will be used interchangeably.

² Bryan D. "Doug" Brown, "Meeting the Challenges of the 21st Century," *Joint Forces Quarterly* (National Defense University Press), no. 40 (2006): 38-39.

³ Ibid.

of OPERATIONS JUST CAUSE, DESERT STORM, JOINT ENDEAVOR, ENDURING FREEDOM, and IRAQI FREEDOM validated this piece of legislation.⁴

While the formation of SOCOM fixed the funding and resourcing problems, it did not fix the integration problems found within the conventional mindset. In the past, Army generals and leaders stated their dislike of special units due to their elitist culture and lack of discipline.⁵ This distrust and ill will could be a relic from the Vietnam era, after which, conventional force leaders sought to reimpose discipline and order onto a “hollow” military. A special operations culture that appeared to emphasize individuality and creativity over authority and obedience was not particularly welcome during this time.⁶

Carl von Clausewitz said, “Everything in war is simple, but the simplest thing is difficult.”⁷ He compares war to an engine and how there is not a 100% transference of energy. Similarly, units in war cannot transfer 100% of their intent, plan, or anything else to subordinate units. Clausewitz called this “friction.” Through lubrication and quality parts made within close tolerances, friction in an engine can be reduced considerably. However, there will always be energy lost in the system as heat. The goal is to minimize the loss to become as efficient as possible. Similarly, the military machine in war will always experience uncertainty due to the inherently complex nature of humanity present in the friendly forces, enemy forces, and civilians on the battlefield. Additionally, friendly and enemy forces are working at odds to defeat each other which introduces a new level of friction that the engine metaphor misses. Command and control is one way that the military attempts to reduce the friction experienced during war.

⁴ Brown, "Meeting the Challenges," 38-39.

⁵ Bernd Horn, "When Cultures Collide: The Conventional Military / SOF Chasm," *Canadian Military Journal*, 2004: 3-16.

⁶ Ibid., 13.

⁷ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. and ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976), 119-120.

History is replete with examples of regular and irregular forces, conventional and unconventional forces, professional and conscripted forces that all bring a unique set of advantages and disadvantages that change given the terrain, enemy, and task. The challenge of the commander is to assess his forces, evaluate their strengths and weaknesses, and determine a method of employment against his problem set. The problem becomes more severe if the commander does not understand the culture, capabilities, and personalities of his subordinate units and commanders.

The conventional organization thrives on bringing order and discipline to an uncertain situation. It believes in the commonality of people. A soldier is a soldier and each has his task to do well. The conventional culture believes in the strength of tried and true tactics and believes that simple maneuver executed violently enough will prevail.⁸

The special operations culture believes in the individual and relies on unique solutions to problems. It thrives in uncertain, ambiguous situations because it sees opportunity for initiative and creativity. It places less value on the appearance of discipline and cultivates a methodology that will operate outside the established norms to accomplish the mission.⁹ While proficiency in combat maneuver is stressed, other skill sets that contribute to an indirect approach are taught as well. Special operations organizations stress the importance of thinking through a problem before action and seek to be as efficient as possible through leverage of enabler systems and combat multipliers in achieving mission success because often they will not be able to overcome adversaries through sheer mass and firepower.

Conventional units and special operations units have experienced friction due to apparent conflicting culture, norms, and values.¹⁰ In the past, command and control structures have

⁸ Horn, "When Cultures Collide," 14.

⁹ Ibid., 9.

¹⁰ Ibid., 6.

frequently exacerbated these friction points by not providing a way to effectively communicate and overcome differences. OPERATION EAGLE CLAW highlighted the inability of the special operations forces to coordinate between services and execute a complex operation. Operations in Grenada again highlighted deficiencies in the special operations forces. A review of these problems uncovered problems in the areas of training, personnel, and equipment. These conclusions led to the Nunn-Cohen Amendment to the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986, which sought to improve the special operations capability available to the country since the Armed Services continually sacrificed this capability for a focus on the conventional force.¹¹

The Nunn-Cohen amendment vastly improved the special operations capability, but continued to increase the gap between the special operations community and the conventional force as they saw talented personnel and monetary resources disappear into SOCOM. Operations in Panama, Iraq, and Bosnia/Kosovo demonstrated the usefulness of special operations and relations between the two communities improved although a significant gap existed, as many conventional officers were still uncomfortable with special operations personnel mixing with their conventional brethren. Many appreciated the capabilities that SOF brought to the fight, but preferred to have them operate away from their own forces because it made the fight much simpler.

With the attacks on 9/11, the U.S. announced a Global War on Terror (GWOT) and soon after began the Unconventional Warfare (UW) campaign that brought about the fall of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. This success demonstrated the capabilities of the SOF community. With Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld's sponsorship, SOF became a central part of future operations such as OPERATION ANACONDA and OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM. Unfortunately, the gap separating the two forces continued to exist, which led to an imperfect method of conducting operations.

¹¹ Brown, "Meeting the Challenges," 38-39.

The doctrine has been quite clear about such concepts as Unity of Command, but the U.S. may not be following its own doctrine. There are numerous examples of documents that call for a technique, tactic, or procedure (TTP) to resolve disputes about mission and authorities at a lower level than the Corps-equivalent commander and higher than an ODA commander or company commander.

This paper will first review the body of work that includes the military doctrinal publications. It will then follow with a discussion of the methodology used to evaluate the case studies on OPERATION ANANCONDA and Joint Special Operations Task Force – North (JSOTF-N) operations in northern Iraq at the beginning of OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF). An analysis between doctrine and reality follows the case studies. Finally, in the conclusion, this paper makes recommendations on how to improve the use of relevant doctrine.

Literature Review

The U.S. military has published numerous versions of manuals that detail the doctrine for joint military operating frameworks as well as individual service doctrinal publications. Over the years, these doctrinal concepts have changed as newer ideas came into favor. Largely, the underlying concepts rarely change though the language describing them sometimes does. Selected doctrine is summarized to provide a basis for command and control doctrine. A quick overview of the debate is framed following the doctrine summary. At the end of the literature review, there is a discussion to provide a synthesis of the doctrine and selection of operational variables.

A review of books and articles reveals a contentious history going back decades. The debate essentially boils down to a primary question of who controls whom with a subsequent question of how to integrate.¹² Conventional forces typically invoke the unity of command

¹² For further readings, see Eric T. Olsen, "U.S. Special Operations: Context and Capabilities in Irregular Warfare," *Joint Forces Quarterly*, 1st quarter, no. 56 (2010): 67. Christopher J. Lamb and Martin Cinnamond, "Unity of Effort: Key to Success in Afghanistan," *Strategic Forum*, no. No. 248 (2009): 8. Walter E. Kretchik, Robert F. Baumann, and John T. Fishel, *Invasion, Intervention, "Intervasion": A*

principle and desire control of all military operations in their area of operations. Special operations forces tend to argue that conventional commanders misuse SOF or constrain them in ways that prevent full use of their capabilities.

According to “When Cultures Collide: The Conventional Military / SOF Chasm” by Colonel Bernd Horn, the conflict between conventional and SOF derives from “the competition for scarce resources, unorthodox concepts of discipline and accountability, as well as divergent cultural and philosophical methodologies of operation.”¹³ While the competition for scarce resources is mostly a moot point by the time combat operations begin, the perception of winning or losing that competition can sour future relations when planning for combat begins. Unorthodox concepts and divergent methodologies have a direct impact on opinions of how to pursue mission success and play an important role in the friction between the two forces.

SOF doctrine emphasizes the importance of SOF maintaining operational flexibility in determining how to best accomplish assigned missions and objectives.¹⁴ This approach is similar to the Air Force. The Air Force does not typically directly assign air platforms to ground units. Instead, it provides a mechanism for ground units to request effects and then Air Force commanders and staff figure out how to achieve the desired effect. In an effort to better integrate into ground forces’ operations, liaison teams and tactical air controllers are spread throughout the force sometimes as low as the company level. Personnel limitations have limited SOF’s ability to embed liaison teams everywhere they are needed, which has limited the effectiveness of this approach.

Concise History of the U.S. Army in Operation Uphold Democracy (Fort Leavenworth: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College Press: 1998), 115-122.

¹³ Horn, “When Cultures Collide,” 3.

¹⁴ JP 3-05 and FM 3-05 outline the tools and mechanisms for integrating SOF capabilities into operations.

MAJ Scott A. Jackson makes the argument in his monograph, “Tactical Integration of Special Operations and Conventional Forces Command and Control Functions,” that when the need for physical integration exceeds the level of C2 integration, effective employment of an asset will be “slower and less responsive, undoubtedly less accurate, and inherently more risky.”¹⁵ This exact scenario occurs when SOF units operate at the tactical level in a brigade’s area of operations, but the lowest liaison element is located at the division or corps level. Without a liaison element, it becomes incumbent on the tactical SOF unit to perform this function, which degrades the effectiveness of that SOF unit as it takes on an additional requirement that it is not designed for. This tension results in additional friction in combat operations and the pursuit of operational and strategic objectives.

LTC James M. Bright argues in a paper that the supported/supporting relationship is not adequate for achieving unity of effort or command at tactical levels.¹⁶ He argues for OPCON/TACON command relationships and implicitly argues for conventional force control of SOF since the primary battle space owner is usually a conventional force. He acknowledges the separation created by legislation, but suggests that commanders need to set aside egos for the sake of operating as an efficient team.¹⁷

While all elements of combat power need to be integrated through leadership and information, this paper will focus on Mission Command and the tasks inherent in this warfighting function. Movement and Maneuver relies extensively on C2 at the operational level in order to coordinate actions in time and space in a dynamic environment. Without an adequate C2 plan, units very quickly begin operating in an individual manner resulting in inefficiencies, confusion,

¹⁵ Scott A. Jackson, *Tactical Integration of Special Operations and Conventional Forces Command and Control Functions* (Monograph, Fort Leavenworth: United States Army Command and General Staff College, 2002), 6.

¹⁶ James M. Bright, *Operational Seam: The Command and Control of Conventional and Special Operations Forces* (Thesis, Newport: Naval War College, 2007), 15.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

and sometimes fratricide. Intelligence relies on the C2 to quickly disseminate information and analysis across the battlefield. Without an adequate C2 plan, units will find it difficult to determine what the enemy is doing at a macro level resulting in increased risk to mission and a potential failure to capitalize on time sensitive opportunities. Sustainment, protection, and fires all rely on mission command to provide the capability to get the resources to the unit that needs it in a timely manner. This paper will conduct a campaign analysis using the elements of operational design as described in JP 5-0 in addition to the mission command war fighting function.

Current doctrine provides the tools to command and control as well as integrate capabilities. However, it does so in a sterile environment that lacks the complexity of reality, which can cause doctrine to be overlooked or overridden by conditions that seem to dictate otherwise. Conventional and special operations forces planning and training have traditionally been separate as a narrative developed where the two forces operate in separate areas. This narrative helped to foster an idea that the two forces rarely work together, when in reality, the two forces consistently work together during combat operations.

The concept of mission command is central to the U.S. Army and describes the systems and principles that a commander uses to command and control organizations and operations. While mission command is a new term, the elements integral to the concept are not new. In *FM 6-0: Mission Command – Command and Control of Army Forces*, the organization of C2 should aim to create unity of command, reasonable spans of control, cohesive mission teams, and effective information distribution.”¹⁸ These ideas are found throughout previous Army publications, but are synthesized in *FM 6-0*. Mission command stresses the importance of giving

¹⁸ HQDA, *FM 6-0 2003: Mission Command - Command and Control of Army Forces* (Washington, DC: HQDA, August 2003), 5-23.

the commander authority or access to all the deemed necessary to complete the mission while not violating unity of command and should support unity of effort.¹⁹

Operational approach, tempo, simultaneity and depth, phasing and transitions, risk are the elements of operational design most affected by command and control in the integration of capabilities. A discussion of these elements is necessary before introduction of the case studies.

C2 relationships directly influence the operational approach. Command and control relationships directly affect how planners and commanders visualize how to approach their mission and objectives. If the higher command designates an OPCON or TACON relationship between units, the controlling commander can mass combat power and utilize a more direct approach. However, in supported/supporting relationship, the supported commander competes with other priorities within the supporting unit in addition to having far less control in directing the supported unit on how to accomplish a requested mission.

Likewise, C2 relationships affect the tempo directly. A commander with OPCON or TACON has a more responsive C2 relationship than a supported/supporting relationship. The commander with OPCON/TACON can increase or decrease tempo much more rapidly due to the control he has.

Multiple command and control relationships can achieve simultaneity and depth as well as phasing and transitions. However, it requires far less liaisons and time to accomplish this with OPCON/TACON relationships than with another command relationship. With a supported/supporting relationship, the supported commander has to form his plan while keeping the supporting commander informed in order to ensure that his plan will receive the support when and where he needs it. With limited resources in a supporting unit, both of these elements become problematic as units compete for this support. Clear priorities have to be communicated between

¹⁹HQDA, *FM 6-0 2003*, 5-23.

all parties. Additionally, changes in plans contain ripple effects that spread to other units in a supporting/supported C2 relationship.

With different command and control relationships, risk to mission is assumed in different ways. In an OPCON relationship, there is a freedom given to the commander to reorganize the attached unit to meet a mission, which allows him to best organize his forces to support his plan. The risk to mission assumes that the commander knows and understands how a unit operates and can then effectively break the unit into smaller elements and still effectively harness capabilities. In a TACON relationship, the commander is given a unit to accomplish a specific mission without the ability to reorganize. The risk in this situation is that the attached unit cannot handle the mission across a geographic area or certain mission density. If the missions exceed the geographic area that a unit can handle, the mission might fail without being able to possibly reorganize over a wider area. In a supported/supporting C2 relationship, a supporting commander gains the flexibility of shifting resources to where it is most needed in addition to maintaining the ability to use subject matter expertise to accomplish a requested mission. The risk is that a capability may not be available when a unit needs it because a higher priority unit or mission has control of the resource.

The debate between conventional and special operations forces over command and control relationships revolves around one question: who best can employ special operations forces? The special operations community insists that the conventional force will misuse SOF by overusing the force in pursuit of tactical objectives or assigning missions that are beyond SOF capabilities or by not using them at all.²⁰ The conventional force argues that by not assigning some sort of control, they now have a rogue force operating in their battle space who sometimes

²⁰ Horn, "When Cultures Collide," 13. Additionally, Chapters 5 & 6 of Susan L. Marquis' *Unconventional Warfare: Rebuilding U.S. Special Operations Forces* (Brookings Institution Press) provides an example of this problem via Operation URGENT FURY and discusses SOF concerns under the control of conventional force commands.

works against their objectives either through ignorance or in support of another plan that has not been coordinated.²¹ The doctrinal answer to SOF integration is the formation of a Special Operations Command and Control Element (SOCCE).²² However, due to the many operational mission requirements, SOF does not have enough personnel to stand up all the SOCCEs that would be needed. Thus for years, there has been an uneasy tension between conventional and SOF. This tension can, and has, generated friction that impedes mission accomplishment.

This paper will use the doctrine in use at the time to evaluate the campaigns. If the doctrine is found to be lacking, then current doctrine will be evaluated to determine if the doctrine has fixed the oversight. If not, recommendations for changes to the doctrine will be suggested in the conclusion.

Relevant Doctrine

Doctrine of the Time

At the time of OPERATION ANACONDA, FM 3-0 June 2001 and JP 3-0 September 2001 were in effect. However, it is doubtful that anything new in these manuals would have been represented in the plan because of their very recent publication. Doctrine in the military is habitually difficult to change and the publication of a new version of a manual does not mean that the mindset will change. For the purpose of the doctrine at the time, the 1995 versions of JP 3-0 and 5-0 will present the doctrine in use at the time as well as Army FMs 100-5(1993) and 101-5 (1997). Both JP 3-0 and FM 100-5 address command and control relationships, but refer to JP 0-2 for further detail. FM 100-5 recognizes three types of forces: armored, light, and special operations forces.²³ It goes on to describe the roles of each of the forces as complementary and integrated to reach a balance, but this manual does not describe the elements working in close

²¹ Bright, *Operational Seam*, 16.

²² HQDA, *FM 3-05 2010: Army Special Operations Forces* (Washington, DC: HQDA, December 2010), 4-13.

²³ HQDA, *FM 100-5 1993: Operations* (Washington, DC: HQDA, June 1993), 2-2.

coordination or conducting offensive operations in the same battle space. This reflects the attitude of the era that special operations forces and conventional forces may work towards the same endstate, but they will work in different capacities and in different areas.

JP 0-2 (1995) discusses the organization of Unified Action Armed Forces as the capstone document for command and control of forces apportioned to geographic combatant commanders. It states that, “Unity of Effort requires coordination among government departments and agencies within the executive branch, between the executive and legislative branches, nongovernmental organizations, and among nations in any alliance or coalition.”²⁴ It defines unified action as a “broad scope of activities taking place within unified commands, subordinate unified commands, or joint task forces under the overall direction of the commanders of those commands.”²⁵ Unified action integrates all of these activities to include joint, single-Service, special, and supporting operations, in conjunction with interagency, nongovernmental, private voluntary organizations, multinational, or United Nations operations to provide unity of effort. Furthermore, this publication provides a very detailed explanation of the terms: COCOM, OPCON, TACON, ADCON, DIRLAUTH, and the various categories of support relationships.²⁶ Importantly, it stresses the importance of robust integration, synchronization, and coordination mechanisms to assimilate and exercise units and capabilities into a single cohesive operation instead of a set of separate operations.²⁷ Another tenet of C2 states that commanders should clearly define command relationships, authorities, and roles in an uncomplicated chain of command.

²⁴ DoD, *JP 0-2 2001: Unified Action Armed Forces* (Washington, DC: DoD, July 2001), I-3.

²⁵ Ibid., I-5.

²⁶ Ibid., III-2. Discussion and definitions of terms according to JP 0-2

²⁷ Ibid., III-15.

Current Doctrine

The Army released the Army Doctrinal Publications (ADP) in October of 2011. These publications are an effort to reduce the number of doctrinal manuals. These ADPs contain the most basic elements and descriptions of Army concepts and doctrine. In theory, these should be written broad enough to relieve the need to update these manuals based on a particular experience or campaign. The Army Doctrinal Reference Publications (ADRP) reflect the current thoughts and practices of the modern Army and may need to change or be updated over time as new technologies and concepts are developed and integrated. These new publications do not contain any changes that drastically change the concepts relevant to this paper.

Methodology

By examining U.S. Army and Joint Force Doctrine for the two decades, this paper will provide the background and theory of how SOF should integrate with conventional forces. While joint doctrine provides the base for all U.S. military forces, Army doctrine will also be examined since the preponderance of SOF ground units are Army. Primarily, the current doctrine at the time of the case study will be used to evaluate that particular case study. If the doctrine has been updated since, the doctrinal change will be applied to the case study afterwards to determine if the change has fixed any of the problems previously identified or if the changes created additional problems not originally seen with the previous doctrine.

This monograph will use qualitative case study methodology to compare cases from Afghanistan and Iraq where SOF and conventional forces occupied or operated in the same battle space. The elements of operational design and battle command will provide the framework for analysis. Research material will include unclassified primary and secondary source works by both military and non-military authors in the form of articles, books, and written or oral interviews of personnel who participated or observed integration of SOF capabilities during these operations.

Case studies about SOF integration with conventional forces are numerous. In World War II, one can look to OPERATION OVERLORD for numerous examples of special operations incorporated into a conventional force plan.²⁸ Likewise, there are many cases in Vietnam about the Military Advisor Corps - Vietnam Special Operations Group and conventional forces.²⁹ In more recent times, OPERATIONS URGENT FURY and JUST CAUSE provide small scale case studies in SOF integration.³⁰ This paper will use OPERATION ANACONDA and JSOTF-N operations in northern Iraq because they are recent enough to provide more similarities with current operations and the current operating environment, yet, still far back enough in time to adequately research information and accounts to analyze events.

OPERATION ANACONDA conducted in the early days of Afghanistan was one of the biggest operations utilizing both special operations forces and conventional forces in support of the larger, encompassing Operation Enduring Freedom. Operations in northern Iraq in early 2003 will highlight an often-underused command and control relationship: a conventional force attached to a special operations task force.

The command and control structures will be analyzed to determine if military forces adhered to doctrine. If a formal C2 structure is lacking, doctrinal coordination elements will be analyzed. These aspects will be analyzed with regard to the elements of operational design to determine the effects on the case study. The elements of operational design include: Endstate, Conditions, Centers of Gravity, Operational Approach, Decisive Points, Lines of

²⁸ OPERATION OVERLORD is the operational codename for the invasion of Normandy. Special operations included small-scale reconnaissance efforts ahead of the invasion, Jedburgh teams conducting unconventional warfare, airborne operations to seize terrain, and the scaling of Point du Hoc by the U.S. Rangers.

²⁹ For more information, read Graham A. Cosmas' *MACV The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation, 1962–1967* published by the U.S. Army's Center of Military History.

³⁰ OPERATION URGENT FURY is the code name for the Grenada invasion to secure American citizens. Although overall considered a success, it exposed several problems in planning, coordinating, and executing special operations. OPERATION JUST CAUSE is the code name for the Panama invasion to oust President Manuel Noriega. It is generally considered a successful operation with successful integration of special operations and conventional operations.

Operation/Effort, Operational Reach, Tempo, Simultaneity and Depth, Phasing and Transitions, Culmination, Risk. This paper will examine the effects of C2 on the operational approach, tempo, simultaneity and depth, and risk in particular. These elements of operational design were selected because of the direct relationships between them and C2 capability and mechanisms. For example, a force's C2 structure directly affects a commander's ability to rapidly increase or decrease the tempo of operations or coordinate simultaneity and depth as an operation progresses.

Case Studies

Operation Enduring Freedom

Background

Subsequent to the attack on 9/11, Central Command (CENTCOM) began planning an operation that would utilize both SOF and conventional forces to “eliminate Osama bin Laden and his terrorist group, al-Qaeda, and to take down the ruling Taliban regime that harbored these terrorists.”³¹ With the help of the interagency community, SOF entered Afghanistan and assisted the Northern Alliance in toppling the Taliban regime. Shortly after this success, conventional forces deployed into Afghanistan. Al-Qaeda and Taliban elements appeared to fall back to the Tora Bora region to regroup and organize. The Eastern Alliance began fighting in the Tora Bora region on December 3, 2001. A lack of overall planning characterized this operation which directly contributed to the escape of the enemy into Pakistan.³² During December, reports of the enemy coalescing in the Shahikot Valley began to emerge. An intelligence analyst, Captain Sweeney, began focusing on this valley and brought it to the attention of 10th Mountain planners who began drafting a plan to fix and destroy enemy elements there. Separately, TF Dagger had

³¹ Donald P Wright, *A Different Kind of War* (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2010), 27.

³² Wright, *A Different Kind of War*, 134.

been receiving reports from their Afghani counterparts and population that the enemy was congregating in this valley. As the intelligence picture developed, COL Mulholland, 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne) and TF Dagger commander, decided that the objective and enemy estimates were too large for his Special Forces elements and Afghani allied forces.³³ Late in January, TF Dagger and 10th Mountain began joint planning to complement each other's limited forces since the valley was too big an objective for either one to separately prosecute. On 15 February, CFLCC (FWD) redesignated as CJTF Mountain and took ownership of the plan that was to become OPERATION ANACONDA.³⁴ It is important to note that the CJTF Mountain was not a complete headquarters element as many of its members had been outsourced before the deployment to Afghanistan to support various operations around the world such as Bosnia and Kosovo in addition to the Joint Readiness Training Center and a rear headquarters element back in Fort Drum, NY.³⁵ In fact, critical air asset planning elements from the 20th Air Support Operations Squadron and the 10th Mountain's Tactical Air Control Party were not present which would underscore a vital error in planning later.³⁶ The accounts do not answer one question though. The 20th ASOS had deployed earlier to support the JSOTF-N and the JSOTF-N was subsequently placed TACON to CJTF Mountain for OPERATION ANACONDA.³⁷ Why did the 20th ASOS stay under the JSOTF-N instead of being reattached to CJTF Mountain? Under this joint plan, TF Dagger's surrogate force under the command of an Afghan commander named Zia was designated the main effort with TF Rakkasan as a supporting effort.

³³ Wright, *A Different Kind of War*, 132.

³⁴ Richard W. Stewart, *The United States Army in Afghanistan, Operation Enduring Freedom, October 2001-March 2002*, CMH Publication 70-83-1 (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 2006, 32.

³⁵ Wright, *A Different Kind of War*, 132-133.

³⁶ Major Mark G. Davis, "OPERATION ANACONDA: Command and Confusion in Joint Warfare" (Masters Thesis, School of Advanced Air and Space Studies, Air University: Maxwell AFB, AL, June 2004), 61.

³⁷ Wright, *A Different Kind of War*, 133.

Operations in the Tora Bora region preceded OPERATION ANACONDA and failures in capturing or killing high value targets made planners question the “All UW, all the time” approach.³⁸ During Tora Bora operations, Army Special Forces had advised and assisted the Afghan Eastern Alliance and encountered many failures in its use of indigenous forces.³⁹ The native forces proved untrustworthy and often subverted U.S. objectives by negotiating with the enemy and eventually allowing them to escape to Pakistan or other areas of Afghanistan.⁴⁰ Additionally, the Afghani forces did not possess the discipline, training, or leadership that was sometimes required during operations and frequently gave up terrain in order to eat and rest. Upon evaluation of these operations in Tora Bora, CENTCOM was blamed for not involving more conventional forces.⁴¹

Inexperienced leaders cannot rely on their experience. This seems like a statement of the obvious, but is one of the reasons doctrine exists. For example, BG Trebon was an Air Force pilot who flew cargo transports. During OPERATION ANACONDA, he was the Deputy Commander of Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) and placed in charge of TF 11 despite having no experience with the types of operations that this force conducts. One operator criticized how the JSOC commander commanded and employed his forces. “Guys who came from aviation units know how to manage money, but they don’t know how to tactically employ their ground units.”⁴² Additionally, another source stated that Major General Dailey believed that “a general, simply by virtue of his rank, was automatically qualified to command and control ground operations, even if he had no real ground experience.”⁴³ This lack of experience in commanding ground operations

³⁸ Sean Naylor, *Not A Good Day To Die* (New York, NY: Penguin Group, 2005), 23.

³⁹ Wright, *A Different Kind of War*, 134.

⁴⁰ Wright, *A Different Kind of War*, 134.

⁴¹ Naylor, *Not A Good Day*, 21.

⁴² Ibid., 35.

⁴³ Ibid., 36.

would become obvious later in OPERATION ANACONDA and directly impact Soldiers on the ground putting their lives in danger unnecessarily.

BG Trebon served two masters, which never bodes well for unity of effort or command. By the line and wire diagram, TF 11 clearly answered to General Franks and CENTCOM. However, Major General (MG) Dailey would write BG Trebon's report card or Officer Evaluation Report as the Deputy Commander of JSOC. JSOC answered to Special Operations Command which was a level higher than CENTCOM. Thus, MG Dailey had a direct influence on how his units were being used in the fight which led to his nickname, "the 6,000-mile screwdriver."⁴⁴

Despite the failure of the operations in Tora Bora, General Franks and Mikolashek decided to continue with the combined approach of unconventional warfare and air power.⁴⁵ However, to mitigate the failures in Tora Bora, they recognized a supporting role for conventional forces to block escape routes from the area of operations.⁴⁶

Initially, an attack into the Shahikot valley was compartmentalized within different organizations. As early as December 2001, intel reports had estimated that a sizable enemy force inhabited the valley. An intel analyst within TF Dagger, Captain Sweeney focused the intelligence picture on the valley and provided the information to TF Mountain as well. Both TF Dagger and TF Mountain started to develop their plans separately, but in January, MG Hagenbeck met with COL Mulholland to discuss a combined operation to attack enemy forces in the valley. Shortly, thereafter it was decided that CJTF Mountain should command the operation due to staff shortfalls in TF Dagger.⁴⁷ On February 11, 2002, MG Hagenbeck assumed command

⁴⁴ Naylor, *Not A Good Day*, 36.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 46-47.

⁴⁶ Donald P Wright, *A Different Kind of War* (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2010), 138.

⁴⁷ Naylor, *Not A Good Day*, 60.

of all U.S. conventional ground forces to include TF Dagger and TF K-Bar with only TF 11 remaining outside of his control.⁴⁸

A headquarters unit is just like any other unit. It needs to train and exercise its capability in order to make it an effective and cohesive element. Not only did MG Hagenbeck's 10th Mountain HQ deploy at less than 50%, but a third of those who did deploy were from other HQ units such as the XIII Airborne Corps HQ.⁴⁹ This HQ not only had not trained together, but also staffed with many unfamiliar and unproven faces.

In addition to the hodge-podge headquarters that was placed in charge of OPERATION ANACONDA, the forces placed underneath the headquarters did not have much experience working with each other.⁵⁰ The plan designated TF Dagger's host nation forces as the main effort and assigned supporting roles to TF K-Bar and TF Rakkasan. TF K-Bar, headed by a SEAL and formed by combining several Coalition units, was restricted by national caveats. TF Rakkasan consisted of two battalions from the 101st Division and another battalion from the 10th Mountain Division. "Within TF Rakkasan, units had been pulled from companies and battalions and cross attached to others to such an extent that from the rank of lieutenant colonel down to lieutenant officers were working alongside and under commanders they had never trained with and in some cases barely knew."⁵¹ These were not even full strength battalions as each had one rifle company removed. Some members of the staff created a new word for the organizing principle they seemed to be following: "ad-hocracy."⁵² Not exactly a term that connotes confidence or competence.

⁴⁸ Naylor, *Not A Good Day*, 82.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 87.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 87-88.

⁵¹ Ibid., 88.

⁵² Ibid., 89.

Interestingly, the main effort was not deemed critical to the success of the operation in the minds of the Mountain planners because of the Afghanistans perceived unreliability.⁵³ The priority that TF Dagger received is reflected in the amount of ordnance dropped in support of their advance to the valley. The Air Force only dropped seven JDAMs on the Whale when TF Dagger was expecting an hour-long bombardment.⁵⁴ Additionally, the planners phased the operation with respect to the supporting effort, TF Rakkasan, not the main effort which would have been more doctrinally correct. They gave TF Hammer a timeline that treated them like an American light infantry battalion, not the host nation force that it was.⁵⁵ SF commanders brought this point up, but it did not change the plan. Once again, commanders were not listening to the people with experience. Potentially, this might have been because of the tenuous C2 relationships between CJTF Mountain and TF Dagger. According to LTC David Gray, “If CJTF Mountain tried to tell those organizations [i.e., K-Bar and Dagger] what to do, and they didn’t want to do, then it became a big food fight- a polite food fight- in terms of getting them to do it.”⁵⁶ Instead of relying on units that tended to fight them on every little detail, the planners might have decided to use units that would take orders and execute. “But Central Command’s enthusiasm for assembling the OPERATION ANACONDA force in piecemeal fashion from a grab bag of units was now paying predictable dividends.”⁵⁷ Furthermore, the friction between the commands led to separate rehearsals.⁵⁸ Since the CJTF did not conduct a formal rehearsal with all participants, units maintained misperceptions about the conduct of the operation. These misperceptions led to

⁵³ Naylor, *Not A Good Day*, 128.

⁵⁴ Donald P Wright, *A Different Kind of War* (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2010), 142.

⁵⁵ Naylor, *Not A Good Day*, 144.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 129.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 130.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 150.

confusion during the execution resulting because of the lack of a common operational picture and an inability to maintain operational situational awareness.

The command and control problems extended to the air component as well. There is a mixed review with Air Force personnel leveling accusations that CJTF Mountain did not place a priority on integrating air assets into the plan and gave the impression that air would just show up when needed because it had been requested. According to the Mountain planners, the air cell that stood up to C2 the air component for the operation was entirely too small, not well-trained, and lacked understanding of how the operation would be conducted.⁵⁹ Considering overall C2 operations in Afghanistan, this arrangement was similar in nature. An officer closely involved with the operation stated, “It was a risk they [CJTF Mountain] were willing to take.”⁶⁰

In addition, the Coalition Force Air Component Commander (CFACC) changed out in November 2001. Lieutenant General (LG) Wald, who flew the F-15E Strike Eagle, which had a ground attack role, had done an outstanding job, but was called back to Washington. LG Moseley who flew the F-15C replaced him. As an F-15C pilot, LG Moseley did not possess much experience in directly supporting the ground force since the F-15C fights in an air superiority role. This is another case of experience not matching up to the job at hand. In addition, the CFACC was in a supporting effort to the Coalition Force Land Component Commander (CFLCC), but “the CFLCC and the CFACC were having trouble communicating because Moseley and Mikolashek did not have a strong working relationship,” according to one Air Force officer.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Naylor, *Not A Good Day*, 134-135.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 135.

⁶¹ Ibid., 136.

Further straining the relationship between TF 11 and CJTF Mountain was the fact that General Dailey disliked conventional forces and disdained interacting with them.⁶² This presented a problem as Pete Blaber the AFO commander was working hard to have a role in the upcoming operation, but his chain of command did not support it even though the situation clearly within guidance that he had been given to search out high value targets. Despite infuriating his higher command, he continued to work with Mountain to develop intelligence on the enemy and the area. “Over the course of several weeks, Blaber and Hagenbeck developed a strong mutual respect, yet another example of a personal bond that helped paper over the cracks in the command –and-control setup.”⁶³

Distance also played a factor in the faulty C2 setup. Technology “had given some generals the illusory perception that they could control a battle from thousands of miles away.”⁶⁴ This resulted in problematic rules of engagement that required a brigade or battalion commander to get permission from a four star general before striking a target with an Apache.⁶⁵ Later this illusion would drive BG Trebon to take charge of the reconnaissance efforts in TF 11 instead of relying on a subordinate element that not only was closer to the action, but also embedded within CJTF Mountain’s HQ, which provided much better situational awareness. This decision resulted in putting SEALs and Soldiers at risk unnecessarily.⁶⁶

U.S. units in contact are typically granted the priority of fires. This gave the priority of fires to TF Rakkasan, which could not accurately direct the fires due to their position in the low ground relative to the enemy.⁶⁷ In hindsight, this did not make efficient use of CAS and CCA

⁶² Naylor, *Not A Good Day*, 141.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 142.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 150.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 288.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 261, 271.

because the units that had good visibility were the TF 11 positions on the high ground.⁶⁸ They could see the enemy who were engaging TF Rakkasan, but could not get their fire missions executed. A liaison element could have greatly improved the situational awareness and improved the effectiveness of fires⁶⁹. Additionally, if doctrine had been followed with priority of fires given to the main effort, it would have allowed TF Hammer to gain access to the valley and relieve the pressure on TF Rakkasan by provide a maneuver force to engage the enemy.⁷⁰

The three commands lacked a Common Operating Picture (COP). Two of the three commands had negative views about how the operation was unfolding while the third felt confident that the operation would be ultimately successful.⁷¹ This lack of situational awareness prevented elements and headquarters from developing and executing branches to the original plan. C2 at higher levels hinges on maintain an understanding of what is happening on the ground and then figuring out what decisions need to be made in order to adjust the plan to conditions on the ground. Planners seemed to fail to understand that the enemy gets a vote and that contingency plans need to be developed because as Von Moltke said, “No plan survives contact with the enemy.” Even intelligence reports that hinted at a change in location and strength of the enemy did not prompt planners to develop alternate plans in case these reports proved true.⁷²

Analysis

The problems with command and control led to detrimental effects on the operational approach, tempo, simultaneity and depth, phasing and transitions, and risk. These factors are related and interdependent which caused an increasingly negative cumulative effect in the

⁶⁸ Naylor, *Not A Good Day*, 264.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 261.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 273.

⁷¹ Ibid., 264, 274.

⁷² Ibid., 265.

operation which culminated with the Ranger quick reaction force landing on an unsecured helicopter landing zone (HLZ) with very little situational awareness of where friendly and enemy forces were.

The operational approach changed from an indirect application of force through surrogate forces in Tora Bora to a more direct application of force with U.S. conventional forces in OPERATION ANACONDA. In the planning of OPERATION ANACONDA, CJTF Mountain designated Afghani forces under Commander Zia with 5th Special Forces Group (SFG) ODAs as the main effort. This planning effort recognized that host nation forces were critical in seizing and searching villages due to their cultural awareness, language capability, and an ability to differentiate between locals and foreigners. However, the planners did not equate the main effort with the decisive point. They determined that the decisive point in the operation lay in the surprise closure of escape routes from the valley. With this in mind, they determined that an air assault operation would not only achieve surprise and provide the ability to nearly simultaneously seal the routes, but also utilize American firepower and competence to prevent a repeat of Tora Bora. The operational approach had changed from using a surrogate force to a U.S. force centric approach.

The tempo of previous operations had proceeded too slowly allowing the enemy to escape. Thus, planners sought to increase the tempo by using an airmobile force to increase their ability to strike simultaneously from multiple directions and in depth. CJTF Mountain envisioned an operation that quickly seized the initiative from the enemy by closing off the escape routes from the valley forcing the enemy to react. With the escape routes blocked, the Afghan forces could methodically work their way east and north into the valley securing and searching villages along the way. By excluding the possibility that the enemy would stay and fight, CJTF Mountain maneuvered into the valley and exposed their units without a branch or contingency plan. This allowed the enemy to seize the initiative with small attack by fire positions.

CJTF Mountain planned their phasing and transitions from a perspective of friendly forces with apparently little thought to enemy actions or consideration of potentially flawed enemy analysis. It appears that they conceptually envisioned a four phase operation. Phase one was reconnaissance, phase two was emplace blocking positions, phase three was search the population centers, and phase four was return to base. Planning for phase two was based on the assumption that the enemy was in the valley. During war gaming, someone should have recognized that the weakness of the course of action centered around the dispersion of their combat power and an inability to rapidly react to a different enemy course of action.

Planners did not recognize the risks to mission by making implicit assumptions about friendly and enemy forces. Assumption #1: We will not lose any helicopter support. Planners assumed that enemy weapon capabilities would be relatively ineffective against helicopters and thus did not develop branch plans for the loss of helicopter lift and direct fire support. Assumption #2: The enemy will continue to retreat and avoid decisive battle. Planners did not adequately consider the impacts of a changed enemy situation despite evidence that was contrary to their expectations of the enemy. Intelligence indicated that the enemy may possess a larger force than planned in addition to indicating that the enemy was not located inside the valley, but on the rim. Assumption #3: The Air Force can respond effectively to activity on the ground. The planners assumed that CAS would be able to sustain coverage and responsiveness throughout the fight, which resulted in poor coordination and integration of air assets. CJTF Mountain planners notified the air component command about the operation very close to execution, which caused the air assets to have limited effectiveness as they began to integrate into the ground plan. Assumption #4: Units in contact are the best units to coordinate CAS and fire missions. In reality, the units in contact were not the best elements to coordinate CAS and fire missions because often they were observing enemy on ground higher in elevation, making it difficult to accurately call for fire. The reconnaissance elements on the high ground were in better places to call for fire as they could see the majority of the battlefield. However, due to an inability to accurately assess the

situation, higher headquarters continued to give the responsibility to coordinate fires to the unit in contact.

Clearly, doctrine of the time at both the Joint and Army level provides the tools and guidance for building force structure, planning operations, and executing in an integrated manner. One officer described the execution of planning and operations as an ad-hocracy which interestingly, JP 0-2 defines a coalition as an ad hoc arrangement for common action.⁷³ While that may define the arrangement, it does not have to describe the planning and execution.

Despite the common action and purpose that each element sought to achieve, TF Mountain did not assimilate the units and their capabilities into a single cohesive operation. Furthermore, the HQ did not emplace robust mechanisms for integration, synchronization, or coordination. TF Mountain did not ensure communication of the complete plan to subordinate commands and violated common practice of incorporating all subordinate elements into a rehearsal. Finally, TF Mountain did not ensure that communication mechanisms were in place to facilitate flexibility and decentralize execution. This resulted in a lack of situational awareness, an inability to coordinate and reassign priorities of fires, adjust missions to tactical units in order to support a new plan in face of a determined enemy in strength. While intelligence can be blamed for not providing an accurate portrayal of the enemy in the valley and their actions on contact, it still does not excuse the higher HQ from planning flexibility into their operations to address contingency concerns.

Additionally, the command did not understand the capabilities of the units it was employing. CENTCOM did seem to have organized a simple chain of command that would be responsible for planning and executing the mission. While it is admirable and testament to the training and character of the tactical units to make things happen on the ground, senior commanders should not rely on lower level commanders to overcome planning failures in

⁷³ DoD, *JP 0-2 2001*, GL-5.

command and control relationships. Fortunately, the actions of units on the ground kept casualties low, but one questions, how much lower could those casualties have been had proper C2 relationships been designated and enforced to promote the necessary planning, coordination, and synchronization.

The doctrine was adequate and stressed principles such as Unity of Command and integrated forces working together. OPERATION ANACONDA demonstrated that violating doctrine is a hazardous decision. Failures at multiple levels occurred that resulted in multiple deaths that might not have been necessary had the command implemented an integrated command and control structure that more efficiently organized and distributed information and resources in an uncertain and rapidly changing situation. While doctrine may not be appropriate for every situation, it should not be discarded until overriding circumstances or factors become known that require a change.

Operation Iraqi Freedom

Background

During the winter of 2002, many people in the Bush administration started to shift their thinking and efforts from Afghanistan to another threat in the CENTCOM area of responsibility: Iraq. President Bush and his administration began making their case for an invasion of Iraq with the primary goal of regime change. Many coalition partners questioned the link between Iraq and terrorism and decided to limit their participation to Afghanistan. Even the domestic U.S. constituency found it hard to justify an invasion of Iraq. After months of debate, Congress gave its approval to conduct offensive operations against Iraq with the goal of regime change based on weak links to funding terrorist organizations, a probability of weapons of mass destruction, U.N. resolution violations, human rights abuse, and an overall threat to stability in the region.

Although, Congress authorized the President to deploy and invade Iraq in early 2003, planning had begun months earlier to decide how to prosecute a war to overthrow the regime. CENTCOM eventually decided on a plan to attack from Kuwait in the south and rapidly penetrate the Iraqi forces' defense to defeat them en masse. A key facet in this plan required that a force would threaten northern Iraq in order to fix Iraqi forces and prevent them from repositioning to block the southern penetration or reinforcing the southern front. Initially, CENTCOM tasked 4th Infantry Division with this mission based off an assumption that Turkey would grant the U.S. authority to stage and attack from inside their country. In February, Turkey denied the U.S. authorization possibly on the grounds that Turkey did not want to be seen explicitly helping a predominantly Christian country to attack a fellow Muslim country. This delayed the 4th Infantry Division's plans to stage and prepare for their mission. As the date for the invasion grew near, CENTCOM realized that the Joint Special Operations Task Force – North (JSOTF-N or Task Force Viking) could infiltrate into Iraq through a long circuitous high-risk route.⁷⁴ The planners also realized that even with the assistance of a Kurdish peshmerga force numbering over 50,000 people, JSOTF-N would have a hard time accomplishing the mission of fixing the Iraqi forces in the north due to the lack of heavy forces since the 4th ID's forces had been re-routed to support the attack from the south.

CENTCOM quickly re-tasked the 173rd Airborne Infantry Brigade to augment the JSOTF-N in order to provide more combat power to increase the odds of mission success. Fortunately for the U.S, Turkey realized that they had more to gain by helping the U.S. after the initial forces infiltrated northern Iraq to link up with the Kurdish peshmerga and accordingly authorized the U.S to overfly Turkish airspace. Turkey feared the rise of a Kurdish nation inside

⁷⁴ JSOTF-N was also known and referred to as Task Force (TF) Viking. 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne) initially composed the majority of the JSOTF-N until the 173rd was attached TACON to the TF.

Iraq that might have caused their own Kurdish population to rise against them.⁷⁵ U.S. assurances to prevent such a Kurdish nation were probably the key factor in persuading Turkey to authorize over flight. Later, this Turkish concern would factor into U.S. plans as Kurds sought to position themselves to enforce their claims on Irbil, Kirkuk, Mosul, and the surrounding oil fields.

With a relatively short planning horizon, the 173rd planners conducted joint planning with TF Viking and within weeks conducted an airborne parachute infiltration to seize Bashur airfield to rapidly build combat power in the area and send a strategic message to not only the Iraqis, but also the Kurds and Turks.

While the 173rd was infiltrating, TF Viking with their Kurdish forces mounted an attack to the east to reduce a stronghold of Ansar al-Islam, an Iranian backed organization.

OPERATION VIKING HAMMER was immensely successful and JSOTF-N turned their attention to the Iraqi forces arrayed along the Green Line.⁷⁶ The JSOTF-N mounted an attack west seeking contact with the Iraqis. In most places, the Iraqis retreated or disbanded into the population. In the few instances where Iraqi units tried to mount a defense or counterattack, effectively coordinated airpower crushed Iraqi units. It is a testament to air power that the Iraqis could not mount a coordinated response and TF Viking advanced much more rapidly than planned and controlled most of the major cities by the time 4th ID infiltrated into zone from the south in mid April 2003. During this transfer of authority, CENTCOM decided to reorganize by reattaching the 173rd under the 4th ID and disbanding the JSOTF-N leaving TF Viking to SOCCENT control.

⁷⁵ Bill Park, "Strategic Location, Political Dislocation: Turkey, The United States, and Northern Iraq," *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 7, no. 2 (2003).
<http://meria.idc.ac.il/journal/2003/issue2/jv7n2a2.html> (Accessed on October 20, 2011).

⁷⁶ Charles H. Briscoe et al., *All Roads Lead to Baghdad* (Fort Bragg: United States Army Special Operations Command History Office, 2006), 193.

Analysis

The effects of the command and control relationships appeared to have been very successful in execution. Both Major General (MG) Mayville, commander of the 173rd, and MG Cleveland, JSOTF-N commander, agreed that this was not the optimal way to plan a war, but within the constraints of time and space in conjunction with the uncertainty of the situation, this was a good effort.⁷⁷ Their experience highlights the training of their staffs and subordinate units to quickly adapt to a changing and uncertain infiltration and ground situation.

With Turkish refusal to allow the 4th ID to attack Iraq through their borders, the operational approach changed from a mixed force to a light force consisting of airborne infantry and SOF. 173rd planners had primarily concerned themselves with supporting the 4th ID in their attack south. Planning efforts had to quickly change due to the operational need to get more combat power on the ground. Since Turkey was not allowing U.S. forces to conduct a ground assault from within their borders, CENTCOM shifted the 4th ID, still on ships in the Mediterranean, south through the Suez canal. Without 4th ID, CENTCOM planners realized that with only Special Forces personnel augmenting the peshmerga, a risk to the JSOTF-N mission existed. CENTCOM mitigated this risk by attaching the 173rd OPCON to SOCCENT who then attached the 173rd TACON to TF Viking.

This command relationship proved to be interesting for a couple of reasons. 1) It was the first time since the Vietnam conflict that a conventional commander worked for a special operations commander.⁷⁸ 2) The units had no previous history of operating or training and would have to work out the details of the operation in relative isolation from each other.⁷⁹ The 173rd

⁷⁷ MG Mayville, interview by author, Fort Riley, KS, August 26, 2011. MG Cleveland, interview by author, Fort Leavenworth, KS, October 5, 2011.

⁷⁸ Gregory Fontenot, E. J. Degen, and David Tohn, *On Point* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2004), 145.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 399.

started planning in Italy and the JSOTF-N worked out of Romania. 3) A maneuver unit commander reported directly to another maneuver unit commander of the same rank. This arrangement is usually avoided by placing someone in charge that is at least one rank higher.⁸⁰

The 173rd planners met with JSOTF-N planners in Italy for a short conference in February. This meeting appears at first glance to have been productive with an airfield and infiltration method chosen.⁸¹ However, it seems odd that the planners and commanders did not develop key tasks or a concept of operation.⁸² Since the planners and commanders could not agree on a concept of operation, there is an impression that there were competing ideas of employment and friction between the conventional and special operations forces. In an interview with MG Cleveland, he directly refuted this impression and stated that the 173rd were employed almost exactly as he had envisioned.⁸³ MG Mayville referred to the whole operation as “a pickup game,” referencing the lack of time and resources that planners had available.⁸⁴ He also refuted the idea of competing views by saying that there was a great deal of uncertainty because of the lack of information about the situation on the ground. This lack of information prevented any decision from being made at this time. This directly led to a focus on getting into the area of operations (AO) and then figure out what to do on the ground.⁸⁵ He remarked that this environment was beneficial because this lack of a concept led to a decentralization of authority allowing lower level commanders in SOF and conventional units to “figure it out.”⁸⁶

⁸⁰ Fontenot, Degen, and Tohn, *On Point*, 224.

⁸¹ Ibid., 223.

⁸² Michael D. Hastings, *The Integration of Conventional Forces and Special Operations Forces* (Monograph, Fort Leavenworth: United States Army Command and General Staff College, 2005), 69.

⁸³ MG Cleveland, interview by author, Fort Leavenworth, KS, October 5, 2011.

⁸⁴ MG Mayville, interview by author, Fort Riley, KS, August 26, 2011.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

MAJ Hastings' monograph reports that then Colonel Mayville expressed concern over key planning issues such as "C2, joint fires deconfliction, battlespace, logistics, and communications."⁸⁷ Beyond the infiltration and airfield objective, written accounts make it appear that JSOTF-N did not have a clear operational concept of how to use the 173rd. The book, *All Roads to Baghdad*, describes only the 173rd's infiltration, but not anything else of real significance until SOF units conduct a handover of Kirkuk.⁸⁸ The 173rd continued to build combat power with TF 1-63 Armor and began moving towards Kirkuk.⁸⁹ Reading Army accounts of the 173rd's actions lead one to believe that the 173rd seized Kirkuk as part of their mission. A comparison of the literature reveals two narratives that are superficially connected and almost makes one think that there was very little coordination between the two organizations. A cursory look at the indexes reveals that pages that cite the 173rd are weakly correlated with pages that cite the JSOTF-N. In fact, the order of battle in the back of *On Point* only mentions the conventional units that are a part of the task force.⁹⁰ Furthermore, the 173rd S2 appears to have had no direct communications with the higher HQs, JSOTF-N, as he talks about trying to liaison with the SOF.⁹¹

Both commanders in interviews reflect what is missing in the written accounts. MG Cleveland states that he made extensive use of liaison teams similar to a Special Forces Liaison Element (SFLE) to ensure parallel planning and situational awareness in both forces. Contrasting with the written accounts, MG Cleveland, commander of TF Viking, states that the actual

⁸⁷ Hastings, *The Integration of Conventional Force*, 69.

⁸⁸ Fontenot, Degen, and Tohn, *On Point*, 79.

⁸⁹ Briscoe, *All Roads Lead to Baghdad*, 225-230. TF 1-63 Armor of the 1st ID was U.S. Army Europe's Immediate Reaction Force. It deployed out of Germany by C-17 and consisted of five Abrams tanks, four Bradley Infantry Fighting Vehicles, a medium ready company of M113s as well as organic fire and maintenance support.

⁹⁰ Fontenot, Degen, and Tohn, *On Point*, 494.

⁹¹ Major Robert Sanchez, S2, 173rd Airborne Brigade, interview by Major David Tohn, 28 May 2003.

employment of the 173rd reflected his planned operational concept very well.⁹² According to Dr. Briscoe, the JSOTF-N took control of Kirkuk with their Kurdish peshmerga and then turned over control to the 173rd.⁹³ This transition was in line with his operational concept developed earlier since MG Cleveland knew that his SOF units would have difficulty in controlling large population centers. Additionally, MG Cleveland knew that Kurdish forces controlling Kirkuk would not be politically acceptable with regard to Turkish fears of a Kurdish grab for power.⁹⁴

The command and control dictated from higher seemed rather clear with the 173rd TACON to the JSOTF-N. However, it is not clear if that authority was ever exercised in a typical manner. In interviews with both officers, it seems that the formal command relationship was not necessary. There might have been professional disagreements, both officers understood that their team had a job to do. At the end of the day, commanders, staffs, and Soldiers worked together to accomplish the mission in a dynamic and complex environment that ultimately proved successful in fixing Iraqi forces, preventing any repositioning to the south and shaping conditions for the 4th ID to take control of key infrastructures and urban areas.

The planners used an indirect operational approach to fixing the enemy by presenting a threat, seizing key infrastructure, and using air power against heavily defended positions. They knew that they could not directly challenge the Iraqi Divisions along the Green Line without their own heavy forces. Even with the estimated 60,000 Kurdish peshmerga and the 173rd, planners knew that friendly forces relative combat power was too light.

The operation was planned with a steady operations tempo in mind to avoid overreaching and add the option of increasing the tempo when opportunities presented themselves. Planners

⁹² MG Cleveland, interview by author, Fort Leavenworth, KS, October 5, 2011.

⁹³ Briscoe, *All Roads Lead to Baghdad*, 386.

⁹⁴ MG Cleveland, interview by author, Fort Leavenworth, KS, October 5, 2011.

knew that the sustainment lines of communication were limited. If operations were not controlled, units could find themselves critically short of required ammunition, fuel, and batteries.

Operationally, JSOTF-N planners conducted simultaneous attacks along three main avenues. Due to their limited reconnaissance capabilities, the depth of their attacks were limited to what pilots could identify forward of the Fire Support Coordination Line (FSCL). Due to the Iraqi experience with Coalition air attacks in Desert Storm, they utilized a variety of techniques to preserve their combat power. These techniques were moderately successful which required SOF units to identify targets as they progressed west. From an operational perspective, the static positions of Iraqi units that protected them from air attacks also made attacks in depth less important since there was little maneuver from the enemy.

Planners utilized shaping operations with the peshmerga and then transitioned to an infiltration phase and finally ended at a phase where friendly forces seized key terrain. These transitions were not time dependent, but conditions dependent. The primary conditions were relative combat power comparisons that were favorable to U.S. actions. For instance, U.S. forces did not cross the Green Line until the JSOTF-N positioned combat power to press the attack along multiple approaches. Once U.S. forces seized Kirkuk, they then made the determination that Iraqi forces would not stand and fight. They then continued their attack west to seize Mosul.

Initially, infiltration of sufficient combat power was the main risk to mission, but with Turkey granting over flight approval, this risk decreased considerably. Throughout the mission, the single biggest threat to mission revolved around the enemy massing and maneuvering three corps against roughly 5,200 U.S. personnel and 60,000 lightly armed peshmerga. The combat power analysis favored the Iraqis on the ground. JSOTF planners only recourse was to rely on air power to close this gap. A coordinated assault launched by the Iraqis presented the most dangerous course of action, but chose to remain virtually static allowing friendly forces to mass firepower against isolated Iraqi units. However, by launching a counterattack, the Iraqis would have given up the advantages of a prepared defensive position and allowed the friendly air

element to more easily target the Iraqi vehicles. The Iraqis best choice could have been to try and overwhelm friendly air attack acquisition and delivery by presenting numerous targets on the move at once. Even with this tactic, the Iraqis would expect to have suffered heavy losses.

By 2003, doctrine had not changed extensively from OPERATION ANACONDA. However, CENTCOM leadership and planners had gained a lot of experience through the growing pains of executing OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM. OPERATION ANACONDA had been under thorough review with an attempt to spread lessons learned throughout the force. Remarkably, planning for operations in northern Iraq followed a similar thread. As a senior commander remarked, “It was a pickup game.”⁹⁵ This is the simplest explanation that permeates everything that happened in northern Iraq. Resources were constrained due to an emphasis on a relatively low number of troops by Secretary Rumsfeld in addition to diplomatic restrictions that restricted the military capabilities in northern Iraq. With this in mind, efforts in northern Iraq were a supporting effort and therefore, these operations received less resources and less focus than the operations in southern Iraq. Despite these resource constraints, the JSOTF-N was exceptionally successful in fixing Iraqi forces and subsequent operations to seize critical infrastructure and population centers.

Planners had expected to conduct Reception, Staging, Onward movement, and Integration (RSOI) in Turkey with the 4th Infantry Division and JSOTF-N. In February, Turkey decided to allow over flights of their airspace, but did not authorize the U.S. to stage land forces to invade Iraq. This left the JSOTF-N in a bind since their only large ground force would come now from the Kurdish people. Turkey felt nervous about the growing power of the Kurds in Iraq and worried about the Kurds in eastern Turkey rising against the Turkish government. The other problem was that the JSOTF-N did not have enough combat power to hold the Green Line, much less fix the Iraqi divisions in order to prevent them from reinforcing south. CENTCOM planners

⁹⁵ MG Mayville, interview by author, Fort Riley, KS, August 26, 2011.

attempted to mitigate these problems by assigning the 173rd Airborne Brigade OPCON to SOCCENT (CFSOCC) and TACON to JSOTF-N. This arrangement does not initially appear to be particularly well thought out as it placed units together that had not traditionally trained or planned together into a combat situation.⁹⁶ However, there simply was not another option. Because they had not trained together, they were not familiar with each other's capabilities, equipment, or personnel. This could have led to problems in areas such as battlespace, command and control, communications, and fires deconfliction. However, as the Iraqis' attacks across the Green Line were piecemeal and uncoordinated, their counterattacks were ineffective and defeated by friendly close air strikes and the use of the Javelin anti-armor missile system.

The operations in northern Iraq demonstrate that the doctrine is both adequate and flexible. Commanders at multiple levels determined that the level of uncertainty on the ground was too high. To mitigate uncertainty, they chose to create flexibility by not dictating to subordinates how to achieve the mission. This created a concept that initially looks much different from other military operations in its vagueness and ambiguity. Instead, leaders focused on the purposes of respective unit missions that allowed the commanders on the ground to figure out how best to accomplish their missions. These operations are a good example of mission command.

Conclusion

There was, and is, not a significant gap in doctrine in either past or present doctrine. However, the situations and conduct of operations in Afghanistan and northern Iraq presented a new level of uncertainty to the commanders and planners. Additionally, habitual training and unit relationships were fractured due to on-going missions, force caps, and emerging operational needs. Additionally, conventional and SOF did not enjoy familiarity with each other.

⁹⁶Fontenot, Degen, and Tohn, *On Point*, 399.

Commanders at multiple levels attempted to gain space, time, and flexibility by pushing authorities and decision making lower. The “ad-hocracy” proved to be costly in lives, but OPERATION ANACONDA itself was deemed successful. The “pickup game” in northern Iraq proved to be wildly successful in terms of mission and men.

Doctrine emphasizes the importance of command and control relationships. Best practices continue to highlight that integration of conventional and special operations forces needs to be better. OPERATION ANANCONDA highlighted that unity of effort does not equal unity of command. Friction caused by the C2 relationships could have been avoided if CENTCOM or CJTF Mountain had employed a more streamlined and coherent command structure. Operations in northern Iraq showed the success of a clear command structure even if was not necessary. Ultimately, personalities and professionalism should be able to overcome disagreements, but when Soldiers’ lives are on the line a clear C2 relationship can expedite planning and prevent friction during execution.

Further research should be done into exploring the tradeoffs of designating a command relationship against letting the tactical commanders try to figure it out. Another area of further research should be into reintegrating special operations officers and NCOs into the conventional force similar to the Ranger Regiment as it seems senior officers have matured in their outlook of special operations personnel and may no longer have a bias against them. Certainly, a level of talent has entered the special operations community and the conventional force might benefit from the increased level of training, experience, and character back into the main stream military.

The author’s own experiences in Iraq in 2009 as Military Transition Team Chief who worked with two different Brigade Combat Teams and two different Special Forces Operational Detachments-Alpha in southern Iraq observed these tensions. While those elements generally worked together, there was a tension in coordinating and synchronizing operations because neither one exerted command authority over each other. The highest amount of friction seemed to be when the elements disagreed on whether to conduct a direct action mission or how to treat a

key leader through engagement. Often, they worked at odds with each other allowing the Iraqi leader to manipulate the situation to his advantage. A primary reason for this is that they did not share a common commander until the three star level. Thus, when parties agree on a particular plan or course of action, an informal command and control relationship can be workable or maybe even preferred. However, if there is dissent on the way forward, an informal command and control relationship can breed additional friction and even become detrimental to mission accomplishment. The problem of friction between SOF and conventional forces operating in the same battle space will not ever completely go away due to culture and missions. However, with the correct application of doctrine to structure command and control relationships properly, leaders can avoid an unnecessary amount of friction in the future.

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